



Life and Mission Agency: Agence Vie et Mission

INTER-MISSION: A TIME OF SABBATICAL IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA

The Presbyterian Church in Canada understands the “offices of ministry” to be Christ’s gift to the church. Even as Christ calls all Christians to share in ministry, he also recognizes the church’s need for leaders. To meet this need, God gifts and calls individuals to serve as ruling elders, diaconal ministers and ministers of Word and Sacraments. Through their leadership and service, the church is renewed continually and Christ’s people embrace his call to share the gospel with the world. Leadership is costly – it draws upon the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical resources of those who offer it. To sustain pastoral excellence, ministerial leaders employed in the church require ways to nourish and sustain their spiritual lives, to promote their ongoing intellectual growth, to nurture their pastoral imagination and energy and to care for the health and wellbeing of themselves and their families.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada encourages ministers to regularly replenish themselves through the practice of weekly Sabbath and days off, annual study leave and regular vacations. The church has also made provisions for ministers to engage in an extended period of Sabbath through inter-mission.

Inter-mission, as defined by The Presbyterian Church in Canada, is a ten-week full-time leave of extended Sabbath. Inter-missions are self-funded. The minister is responsible to cover the cost of pulpit supply during the inter-mission and to cover any expenses related to the inter-mission. The General Assembly approved the policy that ministers are entitled to an inter-mission leave after five years of continuous service within the denomination and every five years subsequently (A&P 1992, p. 383–84).

Inter-mission is a time to get in touch with the Holy Other in our lives. This is done in repose, in line with Jurgen Moltmann's comment about God: “The true completion of creation, however, is on the ‘seventh day’, the day when God takes up active repose wherein the creation is contemplated, blessed, enjoyed and pronounced ‘very good’.” This time is to be taken for the sake of self, not for congregation or the church. The possibilities of study, reflection and renewal during inter-mission are open. Some use this opportunity to engage in academic studies or a self-directed program of reading, to learn or practice a new discipline, to spend focused time in prayer, scripture reading and reflection and/or to spend intentional, quality time with family.

An essential aspect of inter-mission is the opportunity for the minister to spend significant time without the mantle of leadership or pastoral responsibility. It is more than just a break or vacation. It is not intended to be a substitute for a short-term medical leave for ministers experiencing acute stress or burnout. It is an intentionally planned time of renewal for the minister: for the teacher to become the student, for clergy to become worshippers once again, to nourish the soul and refresh their spiritual life and calling. The mode is to be that of follower, not leader, thus the need for a spiritual guide or mentor, to enable reflection and discipline.

Congregations can also benefit from a time apart, allowing the congregation to reflect on its ministry together by exploring the gifts and strengths of its members by engaging in new forms of leadership and pastoral care, drawing them closer together and closer to God.

INTER-MISSION GUIDELINES

Eligibility

- All ministers are eligible to take an inter-mission after five years of employment in the denomination, and every five years afterward.

Duration

- Inter-mission is a full-time experience for ten weeks.
- Study leave or short-term training events may not be undertaken within a six-month period of the beginning or end of the inter-mission.
- Annual vacation time may be added to the duration of the inter-mission.

Funding

- Full stipend and benefits will be maintained during the inter-mission, including the person's contributions to all benefit plans.
- The minister is responsible for the cost of 10 weeks of pulpit supply and travel at the rate set annually by General Assembly, if applicable.
- The minister will also be responsible for the cost of any activities undertaken during the inter-mission.
- Financial assistance for the educational component of inter-mission may be available from accumulated study leave allowance provided the course fits within the General Assembly regulations for continuing education (A&P 1980, p. 349–52, 60).
- Financial assistance for the educational component of inter-mission may be available from the Continuing Education Grants Committee provided the course fits within the grant regulations.

Vacation

- Inter-mission in no way affects a minister's vacation entitlement.

Procedure

- Normally, twelve months prior to the anticipated start of the inter-mission, a proposal must be submitted to session and presbytery.
- The proposal should include the following:
 - specify the goals of the inter-mission,
 - plans for the use of the inter-mission time,
 - procedures for supervision and spiritual direction,
 - implications and plans for coverage of the person's normal workload,
 - financial arrangements in place,
 - the form of evaluation of the inter-mission,
 - arrangements for pulpit supply during the inter-mission are the responsibility of the minister.
 - The subject of inter-mission will be on the agenda of presbytery visitations.

Minister's Responsibilities

- The minister must submit notice of their intent to take an inter-mission to the session(s) of their pastoral charge, normally, at least 12 months before the projected start of the inter-mission.
- The timing of the inter-mission must be developed in consultation with the session(s). Ministers are encouraged to be aware of the congregation's circumstances and sensitive to its needs when contemplating an inter-mission.
- The minister and the session(s) will discuss plans for coverage of the minister's normal workload.
- The minister must write and submit a proposal to the presbytery for approval.
- The minister will arrange pulpit supply and emergency pastoral care for the length of the inter-mission.
- The minister is responsible for paying the cost of pulpit supply (if applicable) and travel allowance, according to minimums set annually by the General Assembly, and the cost of any activities undertaken during the inter-mission.
- The minister will pay the congregation the total amount to be paid in pulpit supply. The congregation will assume the responsibility of paying the pulpit supply regularly.
- Upon return, the minister will reflect on or evaluate their inter-mission according to the method agreed on in the proposal.

Congregation's Responsibilities

- Through the session, discuss with the minister the timing of the inter-mission and plans for coverage of the minister's normal workload.
- The session will inform the congregation of the minister's inter-mission after it has been approved by the presbytery.
- This communication should include the time the minister will be away, procedures for covering the minister's workload, information about pastoral care, particularly emergency pastoral care and funerals, and an opportunity to answer any further questions.
- The congregation will continue to pay the minister's stipend, allowances and benefits.
- The minister will pay the congregation the total amount to be paid in pulpit supply. The congregation will assume the responsibility of paying the pulpit supply regularly.

(1992 A&P, p. 383–84, 63; revised 2022 A&P, p. 196–98, 24)